

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 HA-05 SSM-03 IO-13
OMB-01 TRSE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
SY-05 AID-05 MCT-01 /110 W
-----112257 161402Z /46

P R 161208Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7991
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 2751

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: P I N T L E
SUBJ: LEBANESE FRONT FISSURES

1. SUMMARY. DISAFFECTION OF "NORTHERN FRONT" LEADER
FORMER PRESIDENT SULIMAN FRANJIYAH WITH "LEBANESE
FRONT" REACHED NEW CLIMAX MAY 12 AS HE EFFECTED RECON-
CILIATION WITH FORMER PRIME MINISTER RACHID KARAME. AT
SAME TIME, INCIDENTS OF FIGHTING BETWEEN PHALANGISTS AND
NATIONAL LIBERAL MILITIAS IN BEIRUT AREA HAVE MULTIPLIED,
ALTHOUGH LEADERSHIP AT THE TOP SEEMS DETERMINED TO
MAINTAIN PHALANGIST-NLP UNITY WITHIN LEBANESE FRONT.
IN SPITE OF THIS FLUX WITHIN LEBANESE FRONT, WHICH WEAKENS
POSITION OF CAMILLE CHAMOUN, SARKIS/HOSS GOVERNMENT
HAS RESORTED TO A REVIVAL OF THE OUTGOING "TECHNOCRAT"
CABINET OF EIGHT, IN EFFECT RESTATING CHAMOUN'S AWESOME
VETO POWER OVER SARKIS GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.
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2. FRANJIYAH/KARAME RECONCILIATION. FORMER PRESIDENT
SALAYMAN FRANJIYAH MET HIS FORMER PRIME MINISTER
RACHID KARAME AT A LUNCH IN TRIPOLI ARRANGED BY
ADF NORTH LEBANON COMMANDER, COLONEL TANER, ON
MAY 12.

3. LUNCHEON WAS ALSO ATTENDED BY OTHER POLITICAL NOTABLES FROM NORTH LEBANON, INCLUDING FATHER SEMAAN DWAIHI (DEPUTY FROM BECHARRE), DEPUTY RENE MOAWWAD (FROM ZGHORTA, A MARONITE BUT A LONG-TERM POLITICAL ALLY OF KARAME'S), SIMON BULOS, NORTH LEBANON GOVERNOR ISKANDAR GHEBREEL, AND A NUMBER OF RANKING LEBANESE AND SYRIAN ARMY OFFICERS.

4. THE TWO HAD NOT MET SINCE DURING THE CIVIL WAR, WHEN KARAME AS PRIME MINISTER REFUSED TO CROSS THE CONFRONTATION LINE. RECENT EVENTS HAVE HIGHLIGHTED A GROWING COMMUNITY OF INTERESTS BETWEEN THE TWO NORTHERN LEADERS. BOTH HAVE MUCH BETTER RELATIONS WITH THE SYRIANS THAN EITHER CAMILLE CHAMOUN OR PIERRE GEMAYEL AND BOTH DISDAIN THE RECENTLY ADOPTED PARLIAMENTARY DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES, ALBEIT FOR OPPOSITE REASONS (KARAME, BECAUSE OF ITS ANTI-PALESTINIAN BIAS; FRANJIYAH AT LEAST OSTENSIBLY BECAUSE IT DID NOT UNEQUIVOCALLY CALL FOR ELIMINATION OF THE PALESTINIAN PRESENCE IN LEBANON).

5. REACTION IN POLITICAL CIRCLES AND THE PRESS IN BEIRUT HAS EMPHASIZED RECONCILIATION ASPECT OF THE MEETING. GOVERNMENTAL NATIONAL NEWS AGENCY BULLETIN MAY 12 CALLED MEETING "A FIRM STEP IN THE DIRECTION OF COMPREHENSIVE NATIONAL ACCORD."
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FRANJIYAH HIMSELF SAID TO THE PRESS THAT "THE HEART IS ALWAYS IN THE NORTH AND THE HEART IS WHAT LEADS THE HEAD." KARAME TOLD THE PRESS THAT "THE NORTH IN ITS ENTIRETY SUPPORTS THE ACTIONS TAKEN BY THE LEGITIMATE AUTHORITIES TO . . . LEAD LEBANON BACK TO SECURITY. . . "

6. MORE FUNDAMENTAL IMPLICATIONS OF FRANJIYAH-KARAME RECONCILIATION, HOWEVER, MAY LIE IN REACTIONS OF OTHER "LEBANESE FRONT" LEADERS. CHAMOUN'S INITIAL REACTION WAS INDIGNANT. HE SAID, TO THE PRESS, "IF IT IS TRUE, PRESIDENT FRANJIYAH'S MEMORY IS VERY SHORT." ONLY THE PRECEDING DAY, CHAMOUN HAD DESCRIBED FRANJIYAH AS A "BULWARK" OF THE LEBANESE FRONT. PIERRE GEMAYEL TOOK A MORE POSITIVE ATTITUDE, SAYING, "I AM IN FAVOR OF ANY MEETING WHICH LEADS TO NATIONAL ACCORD."

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 2751

7. PHALANGE-NATIONAL LIBERAL TENSIONS.
WITH THE ARRIVAL OF WARM WEATHER IN LEBANON, PEOPLE
HAVE TAKEN AGAIN TO THE BEACHES, AND THE UNOFFICIAL
TAX COLLECTORS HAVE NOT BEEN FAR BEHIND. APPARENTLY
BOTH PHALANGIST AND NLP ELEMENTS HAVE SOUGHT TO ESTABLISH
PROTECTION RACKETS IN BEACH AREAS NORTH OF JOUNIEH
AROUND MAAL MTAIN. EITHER BECAUSE OF QUARRELS BETWEEN
ELEMENTS OF THE TWO PARTIES OR BECAUSE LOCAL RESIDENTS
COMPLAINED, THE LEBANESE FRONT "UNIFIED COMMAND, UNDER
BACHIR GEMAYEL SENT A KIND OF EXPEDITIONARY FORCE UP
FROM BEIRUT TO MAAL MTAIN ON MAY 11. APPARENTLY
THE FORCE ITSELF CONSISTED ONLY OF PHALANGISTS, AND
ITS AUTHORITY WAS RESISTED BY THE LOCAL NLP MILITIA-
MEN. AS A RESULT, FIGHTING BETWEEN PHALANGISTS
AND THE NLP QUICKLY SPREAD, PARTICULARLY TO THE
AREA OF THE BEIRUT RIVER - BADAWI - BOURJ HAMMOUD.
THE "UNIFIED COMMAND" HAD AN EMERGENCY MEETING
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EVENING OF MAY 11 AND ISSUED STATEMENT CONDEMNING
"UNRULY ELEMENTS."

8. ON FOLLOWING DAY, MAY 12, A GROUP OF NLP

MILITIAMEN INVADED THE OFFICE OF AL-BAYRAK, PRO-PHALANGIST ARABIC-LANGUAGE DAILY, AND ABDUCTED ITS EDITOR MELHEM KARAM (WHO IS ALSO PRESIDENT OF LEBANON'S PRESS SYNDICATE) TO A NEARBY NLP OFFICE. MILITIAMEN WERE APPARENTLY INCENSED BECAUSE KARAM HAD PUBLISHED ENTIRE TEXT OF LEBANESE FRONT COMMUNIQUE, WHICH REFLECTED BADLY ON THE NLP, ON INCIDENTS OF THE NIGHT BEFORE. KARAM WAS HOWEVER QUICKLY RELEASED, AND CAMILLE CHAMOUN HIMSELF CALLED ON KARAM MAY 13 TO APOLOGIZE AND BLAME HIS ABDUCTION ON "UNDISCIPLINED" MEMBERS OF THE NLP.

9. PHALANGIST-NLP CLASHES CONTINUED ON MAY 13 WITH A FIREFIGHT BETWEEN THE TWO GROUPS IN HADETH, WHICH LASTED FOR SOME 20 MINUTES, LEAVING ONE DEAD AND FOUR WOUNDED, ACCORDING TO IKE AND AN EMBASSY LOCAL EMPLOYEE. BOTH CAMILLE CHAMOUN AND PIERRE GEMAYEL INTERVENED TO STOP THE FIGHTING.

10. THE SENIOR CHAMOUN AND GEMAYEL, FOR THE PUBLIC RECORD, ARE REAFFIRMING THEIR CONTINUED UNITY. CAMILLE CHAMOUN SAID "THESE ISOLATED INCIDENTS HAVE NO EFFECT ON RELATIONS BETWEEN MYSELF AND SHIEKH PIERRE GEMAYEL . . . IF TWO PEOPLE FIGHT IN THE STREET, SUCH AN INCIDENT CANNOT HAVE ANY AFFECT ON . . . THE POLICY OF THESE TWO PARTIES, ESPECIALLY AS REPRESENTED BY MYSELF AND SHEIKH PIERRE GEMAYEL."

11. NEVERTHELESS, THE COINCIDENCE OF FRANJIYAH'S DIS-CONFIDENTIAL

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AFFECTION WITH THE PHALANGIST-NLP BRAWLING HAS NOT GONE UNNOTICED IN POLITICAL CIRCLES, EVEN AMONG FRIENDS OF CHAMOUN. NLP VICE PRESIDENT AND SHI'A DEPUTY FROM TYRE KAZIM KHALIL TOLD AN EMBASSY LOCAL EMPLOYEE THAT, TO COMPENSATE FOR FRANJIYAH'S DISAFFECTION, HE HAD PROPOSED TO CHAMOUN HIMSELF AN EFFORT TO REVIVE THE "TRIPLE ALLIANCE" OF CHAMOUN, GEMAYEL AND RAYMOND EDDE, AS IT HAD EXISTED IN 1968.

12. COMMENT: IT IS PARADOXICAL THAT, AT THE VERY MOMENT WHEN CAMILLE CHAMOUN'S POSITION AS LEADER OF THE LEBANESE FRONT HAS BEEN WEAKENED BY FRANJIYAH'S DEFECTION, AND THERE IS A RENEWAL OF FIGHTING BETWEEN THE PHALANGE AND THE NLP IN THE STREETS, HIS POWERS OVER THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT, AS MANIFESTED IN HIS SUCCESSFUL VETO OF A NEW CABINET, SEEM TO BE STRONGER THAN EVER. EVEN THOUGH CIRCUMSTANCES HAVE CONSPIRED TO OBJECTIVELY REDUCE CAMILLE

CHAMOUN TO PERHAPS HIS WEAKEST POSITION SINCE THE
END OF THE CIVIL WAR, JUST AT A TIME WHEN
SARKIS COULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THAT IN THE FORMA-
TION OF A NEW CABINET, SARKIS SEEMS DETERMINED
NOT TO DO SO.
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Message Attributes

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